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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 BAKU 000438

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [AJ](#)

SUBJECT: AZERBAIJAN: DEFENSE MINISTER ABIYEV DISCUSSES U.S.  
ROLE IN CAUCASUS AND TURKEY-ARMENIA RAPPROCHEMENT

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Don Lu, for reasons 1.4 (b,d)

¶1. (S//NF) Summary: Azerbaijani Minister of Defense Safar Abiyev complained to visiting Acting Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Russia, Ukraine, and Eurasia (RUE) Policy Mary Warlick May 6 that the Turkish officials he recently met with claimed the U.S. was pressuring Turkey to re-open the the border with Armenia. He expressed support, in principle, for a U.S. request to provide one battalion for Afghanistan operations, but did not specifically commit to serving with Turkish troops in Kabul or with U.S. Marines elsewhere in southern Afghanistan. Abiyev indicated increased Azerbaijani participation in Afghanistan could become more feasible with the resolution of Nagorno-Karabakh. He objected to a perceived U.S. bias toward Armenia and recommended the U.S. refocus its attention (and foreign assistance) on Georgia and Azerbaijan, its &real8 strategic partners. End Summary.

U.S. IS BEHIND TURKEY-ARMENIA RAPPROACHEMENT  
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¶2. (S//NF) Azerbaijani Minister of Defense Safar Abiyev told Acting Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense Mary Warlick May 6 that he had recently met in Ankara with Turkey's Chief of Defense, Minister of Defense, Chair of the National Assembly, the Prime Minister and the President, and each one had alleged that the U.S. was applying pressure on Turkey to re-open the border with Armenia. Abiyev stated that he was surprised to learn the U.S. was demanding the border be re-opened and warned that separating Turkey from Azerbaijan would only increase Armenian and Russian influence in the region.

ALL ROADS LEAD THROUGH NAGORNO-KARABAKH  
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¶3. (S//NF) Abiyev approved, in principle, the proposed deployment of a battalion in support of ISAF operations in Afghanistan. He did not indicate a preference for the battalion to patrol or provide site security in Kabul with the Turks or to have the battalion work with U.S. Marines on fixed site security in southern Afghanistan. Abiyev acknowledged that rotating battalions would require an entire brigade to be trained for Afghan operations and said he was ready to commit one or even two additional brigades for Afghanistan missions, but such participation would require first of all that Nagorno-Karabakh (NK) be resolved.

¶4. (S//NF) (COMMENT: Azerbaijan did a good job of training its troops for deployment to Iraq to provide security for the Haditha Dam and is already sending regular company-sized rotations to Afghanistan to operate with the Turks. It is thus likely that Azerbaijan could ably train for an expanded mission in Afghanistan. However, Abiyev's offer of a second

or third brigade for rotating deployments was conditioned on progress and resolution of NK. End Comment.)

#### ARMENIA RECEIVING UNDUE U.S. SUPPORT

¶5. (S//NF) Pointing out that Armenia had withdrawn from the NATO PFP COOPERATIVE LONGBOW and LANCER exercises in Georgia under Russian pressure, Abiyev said Azerbaijan remained committed despite similar pressure. He said that Armenia is Russia's strategic partner and totally under the control of Russia. He once again floated the GOAJ claim that Russia had transferred \$800 million in arms to Armenia, similar to previous transfers. He called ethnic Armenian separatists in NK "terrorists" and compared them to Al Qaeda. He also scolded the U.S. for not preventing the Armenian Diaspora from providing assistance to the separatists, equating such assistance to terrorist financing.

¶6. (S//NF) Abiyev complained that the U.S. would not even sell basic ammunition to Azerbaijan, a country the U.S. has labeled a strategic partner, forcing Azerbaijan to procure post-Soviet weaponry that is not NATO-interoperable. Location, willingness to cooperate, and energy resources all make Georgia and Azerbaijan more important to the U.S. and Europe than Armenia, but U.S. policy and security assistance, he asserted, does not demonstrate that.

¶7. (S//NF) (COMMENT: Although Russia has in the past transferred large quantities of weaponry to Armenia, its CSTO ally, the intelligence community has largely debunked the recent alleged \$800M transfer, and believes it is a myth the

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GOAJ propagates to diminish Russian influence in the country.

Abiyev's complaints regarding Azerbaijan's inability to procure Western weaponry have a more factual basis, as Section 907 of the FREEDOM Support Act prevents Azerbaijan from procuring most U.S. military equipment, hampering efforts toward NATO interoperability. End Comment.)

#### OFFERS GEORGIA MILITARY SUPPORT

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¶8. (S//NF) Abiyev spoke proudly of Azerbaijani support to Georgia in the form of electricity, oil, gas, and food in the aftermath of August 2008 events and pledged additional support to Tbilisi. He said that should Georgia and Russia resume military operations in Georgia, Azerbaijan would supply Georgia with weapons.

¶9. (S//NF) (COMMENT: Abiyev's comments on Georgia were delivered after he asserted that Azerbaijan and Georgia were more important than Armenia for the U.S. and Europe, and after expressing dismay that more financial assistance is nonetheless given to Armenia. It is unclear what weapons Azerbaijan might supply to Georgia, but such an action would be a significant departure from Azerbaijan's policy in August 2008. At that time, the GOAJ declined military assistance to combatants. In addition, it is doubtful Azerbaijan would part with equipment or other hardware to defend Georgia as long as NK remains unresolved. End Comment.)

¶10. (SBU) Acting DASD Warlick cleared this cable.  
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